

The Territorial Limits of Ancient Media: an Architectural Perspective

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At a time when many aspects of the history of pre-Achaemenid Media are currently under critical review it might seem more than a little hazardous to attempt to redefine, even in approximate terms, the likely, erstwhile limits of Median territorial control. Nevertheless certain striking architectural parallels that can now be detected at certain widely distributed sites, most of which would appear to have been associated with the Median sphere of influence, may provide a number of clues that can be related to the issue of the approximate limits of Median authority. Obviously enough, such evidence needs to be considered in concert with many other factors, but it may still be useful at this time to explore the nature of the architectural parallels in question.¹

Introduction

In keeping with Herodotus' colorful outline of Median history (Hdt. I. 95–106), modern scholarship as a whole was long content to believe that the land of Media enjoyed unified royal rule from late in the eighth century down to about 550 BC, when Astyages, the last king of Media, was defeated in battle by Cyrus the Great. And while several scholars, including the redoubtable Sydney Smith, were careful not to make use of the Herodotean account,² the story that was presented in the *Médi-kos Logos* only began to unravel in a serious way some thirty years ago.

In 1981, in particular, P. R. Helm was able to show that, from the time that the Medes make their first appearance in the annals of Assyria in 836 BC, down to at least the early years of the reign of Esarhaddon (680–669 BC), there was no hint of any unification. As Helm (1981, 86) notes, Sargon II (721–705 BC) received tribute from more than twenty independent Median chieftains on two occasions and Esarhaddon himself is known to have had dealings with five independent Median tributaries. Also, while Radner (2003, 62) observes that the annals say remarkably little about

1. It is a great pleasure to be able to offer the present paper to Michael Roaf, a scholar who has made many notable contributions to the study of the ancient Near East, and who has been, I wish to add, a valued friend and companion on a number of different enterprises in the field, beginning with the first season of excavations at the agreeable site of Tepe Nush-i Jan in the summer of 1967.

2. For references, see, conveniently, Helm 1981, 88, n. 4.

the Medes during the years of the last great Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal (668–627 BC), she makes the further important point that three Median chieftains, who would appear to have risen in revolt near 656 BC, are each still described – exactly in the manner of those Median rebels who were subdued in the time of Sargon – as nothing more than “city lords”.

In the wake of Helms’ publication, which demonstrated that there was no support in the Assyrian annals for Herodotus’ contention that a certain Deioces had founded a Median royal line (not to mention a wondrous capital city at Hamadan) all before the end of the eighth century, Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1988) offered her own forthright – and indeed persuasive – argument that the whole notion of a long-lived Median empire would probably have never taken shape without the benefit of the claims made in the *Medikos Logos*. From here onwards, in fact, the historical stock of the Medes may be said to have plummeted in a precipitous manner. From a situation in which the Medes were presumed to have exercised control over a vast region that stretched from the Ilalyz River in central Anatolia to Bactria in the distant east, and to have mirrored something of the complexity and sophistication of the subsequent Achaemenid empire, the Medes were suddenly reduced, in a new revisionist approach, to little more than a “band of nomads” (Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1988, 198).

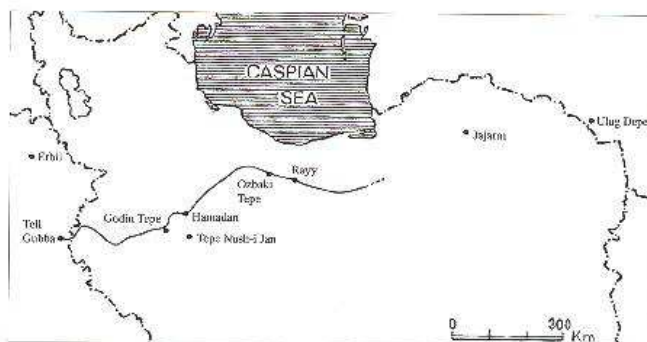


Fig. 1: Sites mentioned in the text. The map also shows part of the principal east-west route that may have linked a number of significant sites in northern Iran during the late Iron Age

In this new interpretation there is, of course, a parallel reluctance to give any appreciable weight to those references in the Babylonian sources that could be said to point to the possible existence of a unified Median monarchy, during at least the last sixty-five-year period that ends with Cyrus’ overthrow of Astyages (when both the *Medikos Logos* and various laconic references in the Babylonian Chronicle do not

necessarily appear to have been utterly at odds).³ But rather than try to elaborate on such issues in the following pages, I would like to take up what I see to be one still insufficiently explored aspect of the architectural evidence that is currently available to us.

As Michael Roaf (2010, 248) has recently stressed, current researches related to Media are hampered in no small way by a "lack of certainty in our knowledge of the location of ancient Media". And, in the continued absence of any pre-Achaemenid written records from what might be termed "Median home territory", the two most potent reflections of a Median presence consist of a now well-established range of pottery (such as was first identified in some detail during the late 1960s) and certain rather specific architectural forms. In the latter case, moreover, it does appear that one particular type of building may well serve, in certain contexts, as an especially useful index of a Median presence.

The Fort at Tepe Nush-i Jan

The type of building in question is best illustrated by one of four major mud-brick buildings that first began to come to light some forty-five ago on the summit of the tall steep-sided mound of Tepe Nush-i Jan, located some 60 km to the south of the sometime Median capital, Hamadan (Fig. 1). Already dubbed "The Fort" during the first season of excavations,⁴ the building consists of a rectangular structure, 22 × 25.40 m in size (Fig. 2) with buttressed and recessed outer walls that were originally pierced by a single tier of arrowslots that would appear to have been manned from an upper floor. It is also of interest that the outer corners of the building were treated in a distinctive manner. That is to say that each corner exhibits a corner recess that stands between adjacent buttresses: a specific detail that can also be found, for example, in the plans of two of Nush-i Jan's other major buildings, the Old Western Building and the Columned Hall (Fig. 2). Located within the circuit of the oval-shaped perimeter wall of the site as a whole, the Fort is otherwise characterized by a single entrance (flanked by a guardroom), by a major spiral staircase that clearly provided access to a significant upper floor (in addition to the roof), and by four long, parallel magazines that each rose to ca. 5.50 m in height. While its strong walls (frequently over 2 m in thickness) were built of uniform rectangular sun-dried mud-bricks, each 40 × 25 × 12 cm in size, its ground-floor chambers proved to be roofed by mud-brick vaults in which molded, curved mud-brick struts were a key component. In keeping with other evidence connected with the history of the site, the Fort is most likely to have been erected early in the 7th century and to have largely fallen out of use (at least for the purposes for which it was originally constructed) when all the principal structures at Nush-i Jan were either scaled or effectively abandoned close to 600 BC.⁵

3 An interval that is sometimes referred to in the present paper as either the Median period or the ancient Median period. Cf. also Roaf 2003, 17, n. 11.

4 Stronach 1969, 11–13. For a full description of this considerable structure, see now Stronach / Roaf 2007, 107–129.

5 Stronach / Roaf 2007, 217. But see also Curtis 2005, 244 for an alternative proposal. Here

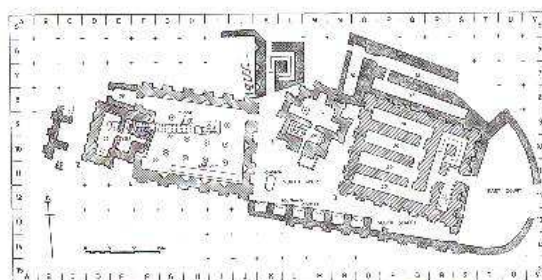


Fig. 2: Plan of the main Median buildings at Tepe Nush-i Jan. Included in the plan are the Central Temple (1), The Old Western Building (2), the Fort (3), and the Columned Hall (4) (After Stronach and Roaf 2007, fig. 1.9)

A mud-brick citadel at Tell Gubba

When the greater part of the plan of the Fort at Tepe Nush-i Jan was first revealed in 1967, no closely similar pre-Achaemenid ground plan was known. Within the past forty years, however, this situation may be said to have changed dramatically. In the late 1970s, for instance, a Japanese team engaged in rescue excavations in the Hamrin basin, on the eastern fringe of the Mesopotamian plain, chanced to unearth a substantial mud-brick structure that exhibits a number of architectural features that are decidedly close to others attested in the Fort at Tepe Nush-i Jan. In this case the excavated remains consist of a core structure that appears to have been surrounded by a monumental, freestanding enclosure that measured ca. 32 m on each side (Fig. 3). The precise location of the site is also of some interest. It was founded on the summit of a much earlier tell – Tell Gubba – a locally prominent mound that stands not too far from the point where the time-honored east-west trans-Iranian highway (also often referred to as the Khorasan Road) emerges from the westernmost foothills of the Zagros mountains (Fig. 1).

In greater detail, Professor Hideo Fujii's (1981, 150–151) excavations exposed the rather substantial remains of a nearly square core structure (ca. 16 × 15.50 m in area) that still stood to a height of over 2 m in places. It was built with large rectangular mud-bricks that were ca. 47 × 25 × 10 cm in size; it was supplied with buttressed and recessed walls with solid corner buttresses; and, with the exception of the corner buttresses, each buttress and each recess would appear to have been pierced by a

John Curtis proposes that the main buildings were only abandoned ca. 550 BC (at the actual moment that power changed hands in Media) and that the subsequent squatter period (with its still characteristic "Median" pottery) continued in existence until a date near the end of the 6th century BC.

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single arrowslot. The way in which the outer face of such narrow arrowslots at Tell Gubba descend to a point less than half a meter above ground level (cf. Fujii 1981, pl. 15, 3) is also of interest – and it may be said to recall a similar arrangement that was first observed in the external north wall of the Period II settlement at Godin Tepe (Fig. 1), where an extensive Median citadel came to occupy “the largest, highest, and most easily fortified site” on the Khorasan Road between Kermanshah and Hamadan (Gopnik 2011a, 1).

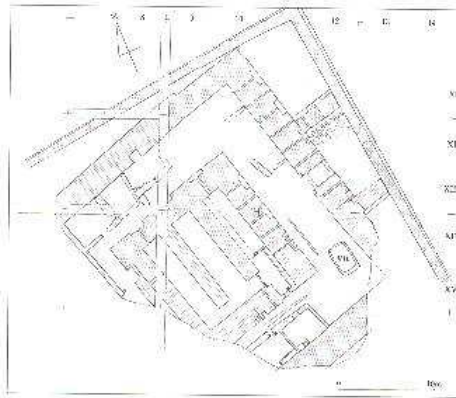


Fig. 3: Plan of the Period II (Median) constructions at Tell Gubba. Note that the thin outer wall is Achaemenid in date (After Fujii 1981, fig. 10.)

The core structure at Tell Gubba (Fig. 3) has a single narrow entrance that opens into a transverse corridor; and this, in turn, provides access to three parallel magazines. Also, even if the truncated mud-brick walls of the fortress are no longer tall enough to reveal any traces of vaulting, the excavator is almost certainly correct to maintain that such narrow magazines could have once had vaulted ceilings. The evidence for the former presence of some kind of superstructure is also quite compelling. For example, the remains of part of a mud-brick staircase were discovered in the central magazine (Fujii 1981, 150) and the rather considerable width of the ground floor walls could point equally well, as Fujii himself remarks, to the erstwhile presence of an upper storey. Also, since the mud-bricks in the freestanding enclosure wall are only very slightly smaller than those that were employed in the inner structure (and since the buttresses and recesses in the eastern façade of the outer enclosure all share the same properties as those that are exhibited in the parallel inner construction), the contemporaneous nature of these two complementary elements would seem to be assured.

A very slightly later phase of Median construction is no doubt represented by the presence of a no longer fully preserved, partly fortified external court (Fig. 3) that appears to have been designed to add extra strength to the only formal entrance to the citadel. One inner wall face in this additional feature also exhibits a "bench-like facility" (Fujii 1981, 150): a feature that recalls a no longer fully preserved mud-brick bench or table that extends for the full width of the antechamber in the Central Temple at Nush-i Jan (Stronach / Roaf 2007, 76).

Finally, a much thinner wall (composed of square mud-bricks that were $33 \times 33 \times 10$ cm in size) appears to have been designed to enclose the still extant Median fabric at a possibly early date within the subsequent Achaemenid period (Fig. 3).⁶ This Achaemenid enclosure wall, which is marked by a single entrance on the same axis as the original outer entrance, is in fact of some importance. It not only reminds us that the usually precise nature of Achaemenid construction called for the introduction of a new type of square mud-brick that normally adhered rather closely to a standard norm of $34 \times 34 \times 10$ cm, but it demonstrates that the late Median citadel at Tell Gubba, which could hardly have been founded in such an exposed, western location much before the fall of Nineveh, then lingered on as a building of some evident utility until at least the second half of the 6th century BC.

Ozbaki Tepe

In the late 1990s Yusef Majidzadeh's excavations on the summit of Ozbaki Tepe, an unusually tall mound located some 70 km west of Tehran / Rayy, brought to light the remains of a compact citadel that yielded typical Median pottery⁷ together with a number of mud-brick buildings that exhibit a number of the known features of Median architecture.⁸ Such constructions included one no longer intact structure that would seem to have possessed three long parallel magazines (Fig. 4). Not much more can be said about this latter, characteristic storage unit except that the surviving three-magazine plan instantly puts one in mind of the magazines in the core building at Tell Gubba – and that other details of note were undoubtedly lost when the whole entrance façade of this particular structure came to be replaced by part of a substantial, oval-shaped perimeter wall.

At the same time, however, the discovery of this 7th / 6th century Median fortress, perched on the summit of a mound that rises to 26 m above the level of the surrounding plain (cf. Majidzadeh 2001, 38), helps to demonstrate that further excavations, not least on the tops of high mounds in strategic locations on or near the Khorasan Road, may very well reveal the presence of still other Median control points that are arguably associated with the Median kingdom of late 7th to early 6th century date.

6. Bricks of this size are attested in monumental construction from at least the middle years of the reign of Cyrus onwards. Cf. Stronach 1978, 87, n. 29.

7. Majidzadeh 2000, figs 1–3. Cf. also R. Stronach 1978 and Stronach 2003, fig. 7.

8. Majidzadeh 2001, 38–49; Stronach 2003, 238–239 and fig. 6.

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It is also striking to find archaeological confirmation of the long-accepted Median identity of the immediate vicinity of Rayy / Raga, which is of course defined in the Bisitun inscription of Darius I as "a district... in Media".⁹

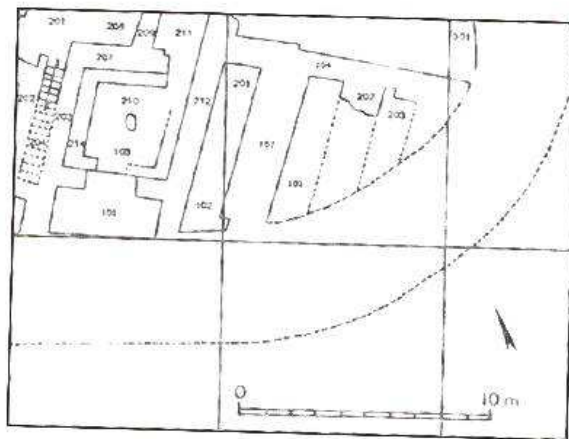


Fig. 4: Part of the plan of the Median level at Ozbaki Tepe. Note especially the partly preserved plan of a building with three long, parallel magazines that stands in the near vicinity of a mud-brick staircase (After Majidzadeh 2001, map 1.)

Ulug Depe - description

The fourth fortified structure to call for notice in this account is the well-preserved citadel that crowns the extensive site of Ulug Depe, located 175 km southeast of Ashkabad in southern Turkmenistan (Fig. 1). This dominant mound, which is 30 m in height, and which rises from the fertile plain that borders the east flank of the Kopet Dag, is also of interest for one additional geographical detail. It stands no more than a dozen kilometers from a point where a river that rises in Iran has cut a deep, natural east-west corridor through the formidable barrier of the Kopet Dag. As the excavator of Ulug Depe, Olivier Lecomte (2006, 17), has indicated, the presence of this narrow defile provides a direct link between southern Turkmenistan and sites located on the Iranian plateau.¹⁰

⁹ For the dramatic account of how the Median pretender, Phraortes, was duly apprehended in this vicinity before being later executed at Hamadan, see DB §32; Kent 1953, 124.

¹⁰ With reference to the remarks that follow, I would also like to express my particular gratitude to Olivier Lecomte for acquainting me with the latest C. 14 determinations that refer

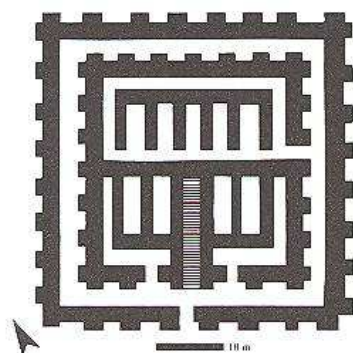


Fig. 5: Plan of the late Iron Age citadel at Ulug Depe. (Courtesy of Olivier Lecomte.)

The citadel itself (Fig. 5) measures at least 40 m on each side (Lecomte 2007, 213) and an open, continuous corridor separates a buttressed and recessed outer structure from a similarly buttressed and recessed inner structure. Note also that the single entrance in the middle of the entrance wall of the outer enclosure stands directly in line with an axial flight of stairs in the inner building that could very well have led to elite accommodations housed in a second storey. Further, if these specific arrangements should appear to lack the defensive properties that might be expected of "an inner redoubt of last resort", it can only be observed that the building was not

an otherwise undefended structure; instead it stood at the very heart of a substantial proto-urban settlement (Lecomte 2007, 210–213).

Circulation within the ground floor of the building can be seen to have followed a number of quite complex patterns; and it is especially striking that the northern and southern banks of magazines were very nearly completely separated by a long east-west wall.

Arrowslots are not found everywhere in the extant fabric of the citadel. That is to say that they are now only visible in certain of the better preserved parts of the outer enclosure wall where, except at the corners, one arrowslot would appear to have bisected each buttress and each recess (cf. Lecomte 2006, 21, lower illustration). But since the excavator has suggested that there was a major difference between the height of the relatively low outer structure and the towering inner structure (cf. Lecomte 2007, fig. 14), it is no doubt appropriate to suppose that the "ground level" arrowslots in the outwork were complemented by a second, more elevated row of arrowslots that would have been manned from an upper storey in the nuclear edifice. The massed appearance of such separate tiers of arrowslots would also not necessarily have been viewed as incongruous with the rather unguarded nature of the entrance to the citadel. Arrowslots were not only employed for defense; but, as Bouchariat and Lecomte (1987, 33) have pointed out in another context, they were variously used for ventilation, light, decoration and defense.

to the occupation of the citadel at Ulug Depe as well as for his generosity in providing the hitherto unpublished plan that appears here as Figure 5.

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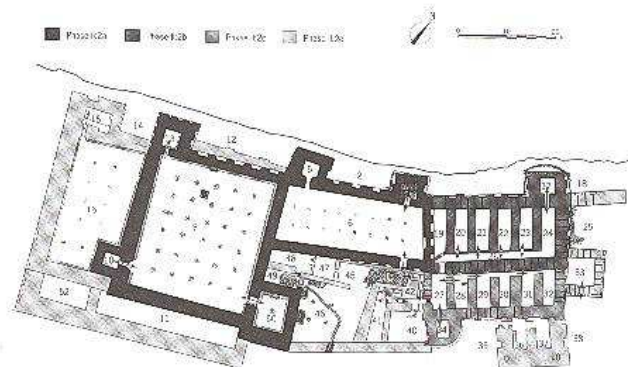


Fig. 6: Plan of the distinctive northeastern building associated with the Period II (Median) occupation at Godin Tepe (After Gopnik 2011b, fig. 7.7.)

The many architectural similarities – as well as the differences – that can be detected between the citadel at Ulug Depe and the Fort at Tepe Nush-i Jan, not to mention various intriguing parallels with Tell Gubba, Godin Tepe and Ozbak Tepe, have not gone unremarked during the past few years.¹¹ Here it may be enough, therefore, to mention certain details that would seem to be deserving of special note. These include the presence of “boxed” inner and outer constructions at Ulug and Gubba and the provision of essentially divided storage space at both Ulug and Godin. In the latter case in particular the plan of the north and south magazines in Phase II:2d at Godin, together with the provision of an adjacent, equally late staircase in the same final phase of monumental construction (Fig. 6), would seem to leave little doubt that the twin rows of magazines at Godin came to support a second storey (cf. Gopnik 2011b, 310) and that this critical northeast corner of the Godin citadel-palace may have assumed many of the lineaments of a typical, fortified Median stronghold: a feature that was far from always erected in isolation.¹²

11 Cf. especially Bouchard / Francfort / Lecomte 2005, 485–487 and Lecomte 2006, 22–23. Note also that one of the main differences in construction relates to the particularly large size of the bricks that were employed by the builders of the citadel at Ulug Depe. The bricks in question are $60 \times 30 \times 10$ cm in size: a dimension that is typical for all the various Yaz II structures at Ulug Depe.

12 Indeed, given the relative proximity of a prominent staircase and three long, parallel magazines at Ozbak Tepe (Fig. 4), the sizeable building that once stood at the southeast corner of the citadel may itself have been quite close, in its original form, to the appearance of other Median fortified structures of late 7th / early 6th century date.

Ulug Depe – interpretation

With so many shared features with a variety of monuments that are located further to the west in the broad vicinity of the northern half of the Iranian Plateau (each of which would appear to date, in round terms, from the 7th to the early 6th centuries BC), it might seem only logical to suppose that the citadel at Ulug Depe was an edifice of similar age with, very possibly, similar political affiliations. This, however, is not the case.

Recent C14 dates for the final phase of the occupation of the citadel at Ulug Depe are remarkably early. At a conservative estimate, the building's latest occupation can now be said to fall somewhere within the 8th century BC (and its foundation almost certainly lies within the previous century). In other words this structure, which is embedded in a large proto-urban site of the South Central Asian Yaz II culture, was clearly active long before 615 BC, and cannot be attributed to the brief sixty odd years of independent Median royal rule.

At the same time the chronological priority of the citadel at Ulug Depe is obviously not without significance for the Median architectural form that is the present main focus of interest. As I first suggested several years ago (Stronach 2004, 716–717), the presence of arrow slots in nearly all the known “Zagros forts” of western Iran from the 7th century onwards is more likely on the whole to be owed to influences emanating from the east than from the west.¹³ With the chronological evidence that is now to hand, moreover, it is possible to affirm that similar building plans, and a very similar taste for the use of arrow slots, were each present in southern Turkmenistan at least a century before any of the known Zagros forts would appear to have made their debut.

Since I am not well acquainted with the archaeology of Central Asia I will refrain from saying anything very detailed about the likely antecedents of the singular plan of the citadel at Ulug Depe. However, if I may borrow from an idea that has been tentatively scouted by Olivier Lecomte, it would at least seem possible that the “boxed” plan of the Bronze Age palace at Gonor Depe (cf. Lecomte 2006, 15 with lower illustration) provides a hint of the kind of earlier building traditions in southern Central Asia that might have led to the introduction, in the first quarter of the first millennium BC, of the kind of greatly “boiled down” citadel plan that is typified by the fortress at Ulug Depe – and which subsequently gained, most interestingly, no small measure of popularity in Iran.

¹³ Even if arrow slots of 7th century (or possibly earlier) date were encountered in the fortification walls at Assur (Andrae 1913, fig. 186; Roaf 2010, 252).

Territorial limits in the west

Before I say anything about the approximate limits of ancient Median authority in the west – a topic that was long removed from any kind of serious review by Herodotus' insistence that "the boundary between the Lydian and Median empires was the river Halys" (Hdt. I. 72) – I must necessarily revisit certain of my own earlier remarks on this same subject. Not long ago (Stronach 2003, 248), I suggested that the Medes could have not only commanded the western approaches to the Zagros, but that they probably kept a "watchful eye on their extended border marches to the west and north of modern Kayseri". Today I am not at all confident that the Medes were in possession of the latter extended border marches, and I have begun to think that it is far more likely that the Medes of the late 7th to early 6th centuries BC lacked any permanent presence much beyond the confines of their upland Iranian home.

One field project that seemed to give comfort, at least for a time, to the idea that the Medes had succeeded in establishing a secure outpost on the Upper Euphrates in the wake of the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC was a major excavation that took place a little over twenty years ago at the site of Tille Höyük, located just over 100 km to the north of Harran. With reference, for example, to the last major occupation of the site, Geoffrey Summers chose to observe that Tille Höyük could have been "an imperial Median establishment on the west bank of the Euphrates".¹⁴ With the recent publication of the final report on this same late Iron Age level it has become clear, however, that there is "no supporting evidence" for such a claim (Blaylock 2009, 206, n. 68). Instead, the use of "square bricks instead of rectangular bricks", not to mention the introduction of red-colored floors, such as are found in various elite buildings at Persepolis that pre-date the construction of Xerxes' palace (Blaylock 2009, 206) would all seem to point towards an early Achaemenid date for the last extensive occupation level at Tille.

It is also conceivable that Summers' particular reading of the last major occupation at Tille Höyük could have had some influence on his initial willingness to think of Kerkenes Dag as a wholly Median site.¹⁵ Within the past ten years, however, Geoffrey Summers' recovery of Phrygian inscriptions in the excavations at Kerkenes has provided this major site with a now broadly accepted Phrygian-related identity.

Indeed, in the absence of any incontrovertibly Median site anywhere in Anatolia, the case for supposing that the Medes were responsible for the overthrow of Urartu is far from strong. In all the circumstances, either some kind of internal dissension within Urartu or the advent of still other external forces would seem to offer a more likely explanation for the eclipse of the Urartian kingdom.

¹⁴ Summers 1993, 85. Cf. also Summers 1998, 405–406.

¹⁵ For Geoffrey Summers' early views on Kerkenes, see especially Summers 1997 and Summers 2000. Also, for my own prior suggestion that Kerkenes could have perhaps represented "a local Anatolian polity" that owed some degree of allegiance to the Medes, see Stronach 2003, 248.

In sum, ancient Median authority in the west would seem to have been much more circumscribed than has often been supposed, even if the excavated record in western Iran suggests that both Baba Jan Tepe, in eastern Luristan, and possibly Bastam, located to the north of Lake Urmia (Kroll 1979) could have stood within the limits of ancient Media.¹⁶ In particular, the pottery from Baba Jan II (Goff 1978, figs. 11–12) does much to support the view that “sites with strong Median connections were established over a sizeable area to the southwest of Godin Tepe” (Stronach 2003, 246). Beyond this testimony – and beyond the important testimony provided by Tell Gubba – it is probably appropriate to recall that, while Darius impaled one Median pretender at Hamadan, he impaled a second pretender, who also claimed descent from the Median royal house (DB §33), at the city of Erbil (Fig. 1). On this evidence, in other words, it is possible to suppose that the Medes spared Erbil from the kind of terrible devastation that was visited on so many other major Assyrian cities towards the end of the 7th century; and, in a location that was obviously not too far from the western foothills of the Zagros, this once major Assyrian stronghold (with its dominant, central mound) could well have served the Medes as a significant forward base near the north end of the Trans-Tigris corridor.

Territorial limits in the east

The limits of Median rule in the east are very difficult to estimate.¹⁷ It is only logical to suppose that the region of Rayy (Fig. 1) would have commanded an extensive buffer zone in all directions and that control of at least the initial eastern section of the Khorasan Road – an age-old conduit for lapis lazuli from the distant mines in Badakhshan – would have been a priority for many separate reasons. Also, while not the least constraint in any search for Median sites in the east of Iran is a relative lack of the kind of high mounds that would appear to have had a special appeal for the Medes, it has to be conceded that archaeologists have still not explored this extensive region with any great thoroughness. If only one suggestion might be put forward, it would seem that, in the context of the present enquiry, an archaeological examination

16 Some uncertainty concerning the “Median” character of the post-Urartian occupation at Bastam stems from the fact that, at the present time, it is still not possible to be sure whether or not the local pottery of the Median period changed its character to any notable extent in the first few decades of the early Achaemenid period. Cf. Roaf 2003, 18; also note 4, above.

17 Cf. Briant 1984a, 88 and Briant 1984b, 35–43. It is especially difficult, for example, to follow Diakonoff's (1956, 358) view that far-off Sogdiana was under Median hegemony. With reference, moreover, to the purported Median authorship of certain of the objects in the so-called Oxus Treasure, my own recent suggestion that the Oxus gold scabbard could be late 6th century in date (Stronach 2001, 242) now not only concurs with Muscarella's (1987, 115) earlier conclusion that “there are no objects of pre-Achaemenid date” in the collection, but it helps to make the point that the “Oxus” materials cannot be used to substantiate the former existence of a long eastern “arm” of ancient Media that reached deep into Bactria (cf. Stronach 2001, 242).

of the tall mound that still dominates the small town of Jajarm (Schmidt 1940, pl. 63) would not come amiss. The position of Jajarm (Fig. 1) may look "isolated" in terms of the direct modern lines of communication that now link Damghan and Nishapur, but in earlier times when one preferred route would always have hugged the southern rim of the Alborz range, this particular location, not too far from the turquoise mines in the broad vicinity of Nishapur, could have been of no little strategic value.¹⁸

Hamadan

One obstacle to any literal attempt to reconstruct the likely limits of ancient Media on the basis of still extant archaeological remains is the current absence of any Median architecture (or indeed pottery) at the continuously occupied city of Hamadan. A brief word on the possible reasons for this striking anomaly is, therefore, in order.

Given the Median taste for high ground, the indicated position for Hamadan's late 7th / 6th century citadel would almost certainly have been the eighty-meter-high rock outcrop (the "Musallah Hill") that still towers over the adjacent, partly natural mound that is known today as Tepe Hegmataneh (cf. Schmidt 1940, pls 91–92). Indeed, when Darius refers to the "fortress" at Hamadan, where he displayed the flayed skins of the foremost supporters of the Median pretender Phraortes (DB §32), one could suppose that a structure in this elevated location would have suited his purposes perfectly. But since the Musallah Hill is known to have been home to a succession of mud-brick citadels in recent historical times, each of which can be shown to have eroded all too rapidly (cf. Stronach 2003, 243), it is hardly surprising that nothing of any original Median citadel survives today.

Equally, with reference to the broad columned halls with multiple rows of columns that the Medes presumably chose to erect on the relatively sheltered, more or less level crown of Tepe Hegmataneh, there is again no reason to suppose that any part of these less than extremely durable mud-brick and wood structures would have somehow evaded total destruction in Achaemenid times. Strong support for this assertion comes, in fact, from the fate of the substantial structures erected by the Achaemenids themselves. In spite of references to monumental construction of Achaemenid date at Hamadan (attested, for example, on displaced, fragmentary stone column bases that date from the reign of Artaxerxes II), modern excavations have failed to reveal a single surviving Achaemenid ground plan.¹⁹ Indeed, in terms of ground plans, the recent large-scale excavations at Tepe Hegmataneh have done nothing more than reveal the remains of carefully planned Seleucid / Parthian structures that stand – presumably after the deliberate removal of all earlier remains – directly on virgin soil.²⁰

18 Equally, renewed excavations at Tepe Yam, a dominant site in the vicinity of Quchan, some 150 km north of Meshed (Ricciardi 1980, fig. A), could very well throw valuable light on a further possible "frontier district" situated towards the eastern edge of the Iranian plateau.

19 For the inscriptions in question, see, e.g., Sarraf 2003, pl. 21b; also Kent 1953, 155.

20 Cf. Sarraf 2003, fig. 1. Also, with reference to the date of these extensive, somewhat

Southern and northern perspectives

To-date there is no archaeological evidence to suggest that the ancient Medes exercised close, overarching control over any part of the southern half of the Iranian plateau. It is true that the multiple rows of columns in Palace P at Pasargadae, where Cyrus introduced five rows of six columns in the main hall (Stronach 1978, 103), could have been inspired by the similar columniation that occurs, for example, in the principal Median hall at Godin Tepe (Young 1969, fig. 36); and that, in terms of monumental Achaemenid architecture as a whole, the use of many varied features, including curved, molded mud vaulting struts, could all have been borrowed from Median sources.²¹ But such observations do no more than highlight the regional repute of Median architecture in the years prior to the rise of Cyrus; they do not, at least to my mind, constitute proof that the Medes themselves ruled any part of southern Iran.

It is also possible to offer somewhat similar observations with respect to Armenia. Even if it is sometimes asserted that the Medes conquered Armenia (see, e.g., Ghirshman 1964, 386), I am not aware of any locally excavated materials that can be used to substantiate such a claim. It is true that five rows of six columns were employed in the large columned hall at Erebuni; but, once again, the presence of this apparently widespread design is not likely to be more than a product of architectural influences emanating from the neighboring region of Iran. (Cf. Stronach / Thraue / Goff / Farahani 2010: 127.)

Epilogue

The present attempt to redefine the approximate boundaries of ancient Media (in terms, in part, of the known distribution of a specific type of structure that is akin to the Fort at Tepe Nush-i Jan) may not have carried as much conviction as might otherwise have been the case if more information had been forthcoming from eastern Iran. Nevertheless there is at least one other monument of slightly later date that cannot be excluded from the present discussion. The structure in question is the majestic Apadana at Persepolis (Fig. 7).

Soon after his accession in 522 BC, Darius, an exceptional royal architect, took steps to introduce his own decidedly original, wholly reworked version of the long-lived Iranian columned hall. With a height of close to 20 m, the structure is chiefly defined by a square columned hall with six rows of six columns, four corner towers, and three columned porticoes, each of which rise to the full height of the building. In the present context it is of course the four corner towers (better preserved in the Apadana at Persepolis than in the corresponding audience hall at Susa) that are of special interest.

Apart from making due allowance for the practical benefits that were no doubt provided by these formidable mud-brick corner towers (each of which was equipped with a guard room, a corridor, three magazines and a tall internal staircase), it has to

anonymous looking structures. see www.begmataneh.ir/hcgmataneh.htm.

21 See especially Roaf 2010, 250–253 with figs 21.2 and 21.3.

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be asked if there could have been a hitherto undetected symbolic significance behind their presence in this rigorously planned building. That is to say that, if the vast hall (with the throne of the king at the heart of the design) was meant to stand for the broad expanse of the royal dominions, could the fort-like corner towers, seemingly loosely modeled on the old "watch stations" of Media, have somehow symbolized the well-protected boundaries of the far-flung Achaemenid realm? Also, quite apart from this strictly tentative suggestion, it may not be out of place to raise the possibility that Darius deliberately chose to offer this mute "architectural salute" to the Medes: an Iranian people who succeeded in creating a viable political entity that in various ways prepared the way for the meteoric rise of the Persians in the span of a few years not long after the fall of their own short-lived but far from insignificant kingdom.²²

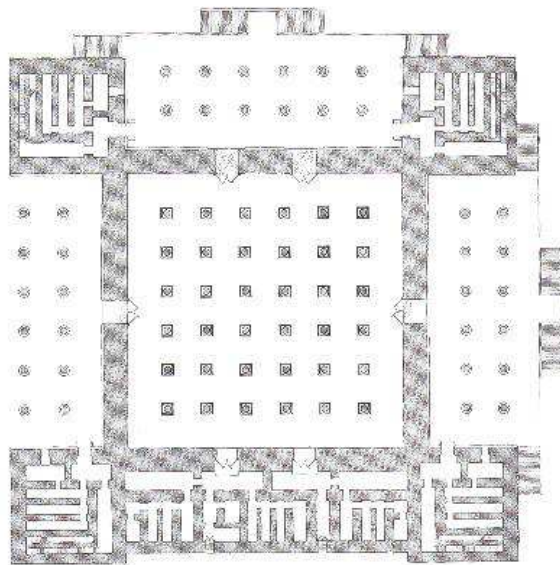


Fig. 7: Plan of the Apadana at Persepolis (After Shahbazi 2004, fig. 24.)

²² For further notes on Darius' acute awareness of not only his Persian heritage, but also his larger Iranian heritage, see, e.g., Stronach 2011, 481–482.

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